



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

Haunted Seasons: Television Ghost Stories for Christmas and Horror for Halloween

Johnston, D. (2015). *Haunted Seasons: Television Ghost Stories for Christmas and Horror for Halloween*. (1 ed.) (Palgrave Gothic). Palgrave/Macmillan. <http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/haunted-seasons-derek-johnston/?sf1=barcode&st1=9781137298942>

Document Version:

Early version, also known as pre-print

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

Publisher rights

Derek Johnston, *Haunted Seasons: Television Ghost Stories for Christmas and Horror for Halloween*, 2015, Palgrave Macmillan reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

This extract is taken from the author's original manuscript and has not been edited. The definitive, published, version of record is available here: <http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/haunted-seasons-derek-johnston/?sf1=barcode&st1=9781137298942>

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

Chapter 1: The British Ghost Story at Christmas

This chapter traces the historical connections between Christmas and the ghost story in Britain, before moving on to a brief consideration of Halloween and horror tales. By highlighting the development of these two different traditions, we will see where they diverge, and how these cultural phenomena developed. This requires drawing upon archaeological, historical and literary resources, and making a number of suppositions. A problem here is that we are dealing with the history of storytelling, a largely oral culture or tradition, and so one which leaves little in the way of historical traces.

Some examples of how this connection between the seasonal and the horrific has found expression in British culture were outlined in the Introduction. However, the depth of the associations seems particularly strong. Twice in his chapter on Victorian serial killers and their mediatisation, Matthew Sweet connects the images of these figures with the seasonal. He expressly considers media representations of the Jack the Ripper murders to have provided it with a 'fog-bound, Christmassy charm' (Sweet 2001, p. 84). While Sweet emphasises that this 'charm' comes from a century or so of mediation, and is at pains to stress the horrible, banal reality of the murders, he does not tackle the question of why this association should be seasonal. This chapter explores some of the material that can suggest why.

Prehistory and Oral Traditions

In her history of the English ghost story, Julia Briggs claims that 'Ghost stories are as old and older than literature, and in many pre-literate societies all over the world ghosts act as the protectors and guardians of social values and traditional wisdom' (1977, p.25). This suggests one of the key roles of the ghost story that will be explored throughout the following history of the specifically seasonal supernatural tale: that these stories operate as opportunities to reaffirm social values and behaviours and to provide warning tales of what happens when these boundaries are transgressed, and that the recurring seasonal nature of these stories provides them with an added emphasis and power.

Seasonal rituals, or calendar customs, have been described as particularly revealing of folk tradition. They connect to all of the different aspects of traditional life, including the environment, the

routine and the extraordinary, the social and the individual. Not only this, but, as folklorist Kevin Danaher claims, 'it reaches back through time into the remote and unknown depths of prehistory' (1972, p.11). This points to the first issue with any attempt to uncover the origins of these folk traditions: the issue of finding evidence in the first place.

Researching folk practices has been described by oral historian George Ewart Evans as being like discerning 'the pattern under the plough':

the crop marks seen in the aerial photographs of some of our fields. Just as the pattern of the ancient settlements is still to be seen in spite of years of repeated ploughings, so the beliefs and customs linked with the old rural way of life in Britain have survived the pressures and changes of many centuries. They are so old that they cannot be dated; and on this count alone they are historical evidence, as valuable as the archaeological remains that are dug from those sites so dramatically revealed since the development of the aeroplane. (1994, p.2)

In the case of these traditions, they have had their original outlines blurred by the changes in society and culture, and the simple drift of behaviour and processes of adaptation, forgetting and remembering. This includes the movement from oral to written culture, and the way that folk culture has been repeatedly dismissed, demonised, suppressed, as well as exalted, romanticised, and 'made suitable' for wider consumption. Evans' own recording of oral history is part of this process, freezing as history some parts of living culture, making the specific general, and presenting it for a wider audience with a romantic glow, while admitting of some of the negative aspects of rural poverty.

Danaher has warned of the temptations of 'delving into the origins of custom and belief', as 'the materials of folk tradition are so abundant and so varied that evidence may be adduced to prove almost any theory' (1972, p.12). This is the problem that faces the excavation of the historical roots of the ghost story for Christmas. There are hints and indications of traditional practices, as will be seen, but the main evidence for oral traditions comes, ironically, through written materials. Telling a story out loud leaves no immediate trace on the historical record; writing it down, or at least having

someone write down that they have heard the performance, does preserve it. Thus it is to literature that we have to turn for much of this historical narrative, and it is literature that uncovers the oldest association of supernatural and Christmas celebrations. However, before examining these literary records, it is worth noting the archaeological evidence for earlier seasonal engagements with the dead during winter.

What little we know about pre-Christian traditions comes primarily from histories, often written by conquering people such as the Romans, or by the biased chroniclers of the Christian monasteries. Archaeologist Paul Frodsham has argued that 'the nativity is but one version of the very ancient practice of celebrating the annual death and rebirth of the sun' (2008, p.7). This claim tallies with others, such as those of historian Ronald Hutton, which set aside the specifically Christian aspects of the festival to tie it in to a broader winter celebration with ancient, pagan roots (1997, p.8).

Drawing on Miranda Green's *The Gods of the Celts*, Frodsham states that after the Neolithic era, in Gaelic areas, Samhain marked the start of Winter, and so became associated with the dead alongside the death of the agriculturally productive year (2008, p.49). This shift of the worship of, or at least reconnection with, ancestors from the midwinter solstice and the 'rebirth of the sun' to the start of winter occurred between the Neolithic and Iron Age. The Neolithic connection between the winter solstice and ancestor worship has been established largely through a study of the alignment and presentation of Neolithic tombs, which are illuminated precisely and strikingly by the solstice sun. As Frodsham summarises the change, 'by the time that we again have clear evidence for midwinter celebrations, during the Roman era, there no longer seems to be an association between midwinter and the dead' (2008, p.50). The movement of the festival of communion with the dead to Samhain occurs with the development of what is now termed a 'Celtic' culture in Britain. This is the nearest connection that we really have to Halloween being a survival of a pagan tradition, or the idea of ghost stories at Christmas themselves being survivals of pagan tradition.

This raises an issue that becomes more significant the closer that we move towards the more literary tradition of Christmas ghost stories. Having a festival of the dead does not mean that it was a festival where ghost stories were told. Having a date where supernatural forces were said to roam freely does not mean that the people huddled inside told supernatural tales. If there were a true belief

in such forces, then it would seem more likely that any stories told and songs sung would be more concerned with providing comfort, although there is also the possibility of such stories existing in order to explain *why* everyone gathers inside on that night. Yet, particularly when we reach the literary products of the nineteenth century and after, we are faced with two types of stories connecting ghosts and Christmas. It is notable that most of the ghost stories told at Christmas are not *set* at Christmas. Similarly, there are stories told about Christmas which mention the telling of ghost stories, but which are not themselves ghost stories. These are useful because they provide historical evidence for there being a Christmas, or Halloween, ghost story tradition. The examination of the ghost stories that were told at Christmas, or Halloween, then suggests something of the themes and ideas with which people were concerned within those social and historical contexts. Briggs suggests that the connection of ghosts to ancient festivals may have been encompassed by the Christian Church's conscious establishment of its own new festivals on the dates of older pagan festivals, with the appropriate Christian gloss put on stories and rituals. Thus, 'The appearance of ghosts on Christmas Eve could be explained in Christian terms as the disturbance of souls in Purgatory, before the advent of the Saviour at midnight brought them peace' (Briggs, 1977, p.40). As we shall see, these considerations of how belief in ghosts operated in relation to dominant religious beliefs would have great significance in the development of the seasonal nature of the ghost story in the British Isles and the United States of America.

The Middle Ages

And so we move from the archaeological evidence of practices predating the Roman occupation of Britain in the first century AD to the written records of over a millennium later. Dating from 'the later half of the fourteenth century' (Tolkien, 1975, p.13), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* tells the story of the arrival of the mysterious and supernatural Green Knight of the title at the court of King Arthur, of his challenge that is taken up by Sir Gawain, and of the moral and physical journey that follows. What can easily be forgotten about this tale, with its central image of a green man picking up his own severed head and riding out of court, is that it starts at Christmas. Not only that, but King Arthur is declared to have a particular habit for the season, in that he refuses to eat until he

has heard 'some strange story or stirring adventure' (Tolkien, 1975, p.27). Indeed, upon seeing the decapitated Green Knight pick up his head, speak to Gawain of his promise, and ride from the court, Arthur says, in Tolkien's translation:

Such cunning play well becomes the Christmas tide,
interludes, and the like, and laughter and singing,
amid these noble dances of knights and dames. (1975, p.36)

The descriptions of Christmas festivities in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* point to singing, dancing, feasting and games, but only Arthur's peculiar and personal choice relates at all to stories. Nevertheless, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* still suggests strongly that there were general Christmas traditions of celebration, and also that narratives of the weird were part of this tradition alongside the feasting, singing and dancing. It may only be Arthur who has this particular tradition of fasting until he has been told a tale, but it is because he presents such tales as being appropriate to the season. That indicates a wider tradition, an idea which is supported by the connections between the Green Knight and the figure of the 'wild man' of popular tales and dramas, including Christmas dramas for the court of Edward III at least as early as 1348 (Benson 1965, p.80). This character represented a natural opposition and warning to the artificiality of the court and its entertainments, reconnecting it to the reality of the outside world, where pride and courtliness are no aid against hunger and weather.

Benson identifies the French *Le Livre de Caradoc* in the First Continuation of Chretien de Troyes' *Perceval, the Story of the Grail* as one source for *Gawain and the Green Knight*, although Tolkien and Gordon reject it as the direct source (1967, p.xvi). In this tale from the late-twelfth / early-thirteenth Centuries, Arthur refuses to eat at Pentecost until he has seen some marvel (Benson 1965, p.19). Benson claims that this is a development of the long tradition of tales of 'the exchange of blows', developing into a literary tradition from a folk one through the 8th Century Irish *Fled Bricend* (1965, p.20). What the *Caradoc* version does is pin the tale to a particular time of year, with its two

challenges occurring one year apart, albeit at the spring festival rather than winter, emphasising the aspect of rebirth in the tale rather than of fear of death.

The Green Knight is not only significant here because he is a supernatural representative appearing at Christmas and challenging the comfortable world of the court. He is also a figure of death and continued life, and so clearly representative of the natural world and its cycles of apparent death and rebirth which are key at the winter period. However, this also associates him with the supernatural recurrence of the dead, such as ghosts. Benson points out that not only was green 'the color of fairies and sometimes of ghosts', but that it is also 'the color of death', as well as 'otherworld creatures' and even the Devil (1965, p.91). The Green Knight is therefore understandable as representing a number of different otherworldly incursions into the normative, celebratory world of King Arthur's Christmas court. In this way, the Green Knight serves as a reminder of those things that lie outside of the celebration and the civilised society of the court, in the same way that the ghosts and demons of later Christmas ghost stories would serve as reminders of things outside the cosy circle of the family celebration. Whether it is the past, nature, the poor, or even death itself, these supernatural visitors erupt into the normal world of the celebrations to provide a sobering note of balance.

It was not just in romances of the period that there was an element of horror brought into the Christmas festivities. *Gawain and the Green Knight*, as a Christian poem, fits with the concerns and entertainment provided by the Church at this holiday season. Robert A. Davis notes that, in Christian literature, 'Christmas and Epiphany were, in fact, much more common occasions for hauntings than All Saints and All Souls, suggesting that ghosts regularly took shameless advantage of the meagre leisure time of medieval people' (2009, p.38). Frodsham records how thirteenth and fourteenth century sermons focussed on the Nativity. Rural congregations would have been able to connect more directly to the role of the shepherds, and to the poverty of Joseph and Mary, but these aspects would also have served as a reminder to more wealthy listeners of the wider presence and importance of the poor within society during a season of want. Frodsham also notes that 'The slaughter of the innocents was also a popular theme, bringing a degree of horror to the otherwise joyous celebrations' (2008, p.101). The contrast between the celebration and horror carries a Christian message along with its pleasurable frisson of fear, a message about the monstrosity of the non-Christian, about the

persecution of Christians, and about the need to follow the urging of God's authorities in order to escape the horrors of the slaughter. Once again, horror was used in the Christmas period in order to deliver a lesson in an entertaining way. As we shall see, this conception of hauntings and other supernatural visitations as being the result of personal moral failings is one that remains central to the Christmas ghost story throughout its history, but that such stories also come to represent social moral failings, particularly in the nineteenth century. It is also worth noting that, even at this early date, these horrific Christmas tales seem to look nostalgically to the past, to the celebrations of the great court of King Arthur, a trope that will become not only familiar, but more pronounced as this narrative continues.

Reformation to Victoria

By the end of the sixteenth century Britain was moving from being a pre-literate society to one where literacy was, if not yet the norm, at least easily accessible. The spread of access to literacy throughout society during the period from the early Middle Ages to the end of the sixteenth century thus means that this period is more likely to see the spread of cultural activities and beliefs from one area to another. It also makes possible the preservation of actual traditions, but also the reinterpretation, transformation and invention of traditions through published works. While traditional activities and beliefs have always been subject to change, this means that a new set of influences would be brought to bear on these activities and beliefs. It also meant that records of traditional behaviour and thought could fix particular ideas of these, meaning that a single example can be taken by later interpreters as being representative of a much wider culture, when that was not actually the case. All of these warnings need to be kept in mind as we move into this more-literate society.

The period of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation also brought about conscious changes to traditions. Some seen as Catholic were suppressed, only to be revived, then suppressed again as the religious wind shifted. In addition to this, historians now argue that this period represents a time when social division was emphasised through cultural practices, separating the wealthy off from the majority of the people to a greater degree than before. As well as using cultural practices and traditions as signs of social distinction, the wealthy were apparently now more ready to regulate how

the poor behaved, suppressing traditions and activities that were disapproved of. Across central and western Europe, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a time of the persecution of those who did not fit in, and a reinforcement of pious, orderly behaviour (Hutton 1994, p.111). It also led to an increase in organised entertainment, for rich and poor, as opposed to communal activities (Hutton 1994, p.122), including the adaptation of traditional behaviours such as appointment of a harvest queen, morris dancing and the like to provide entertainments for the court (Hutton 1994, pp.124-125). In other words, traditional behaviours and celebrations that had been part of popular culture became codified and prettified to serve as entertainment for those of high position, at the same time that the religious authorities were taking the opportunity to stamp out a number of the genuine popular celebrations as being inappropriate for the state expression of religion, particularly evangelical Protestantism. This is a pattern that would recur several times through history, particularly in the Victorian era, and its effect on traditions of telling seasonal supernatural can largely only be guessed at. However, it seems reasonable to assume that such tales would become at least regarded as old-fashioned, associated probably with the peasantry, while the wealthy could afford staged entertainments, plays, masques and dances.

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century brought about a change in the official understanding of the existence of ghosts. Simply, they did not exist. As all souls would be consigned to either heaven or hell upon death, there was no way that a spirit could be left to wander the mortal realm. Apparitions, then, could only be understood as the manifestation of demons, and so 'narratives of encounters with supposed ghosts should have functioned as clear-headed cautionary tales, of the dangers of Satanic temptation, and of practical instruction on how to overcome it' (Marshall 2010, p.24).

However, while the official position may have been clear, it was not communicated widely, and, rather than engage with popular beliefs about ghosts to use them as teaching points in 'correct' belief, it seems that sermons by and large simply ignored them. Marshall attributes this lack of engagement with the subject to a number of reasons, despite the clear opportunity that it presented to show Catholic belief, which accepted ghosts as the spirits of the dead, as being demonic. In part, there was the issue that scripture actually was unambiguous that Samuel had prophesied after death, but

there was also the problem of integrating with existing folk beliefs, where ghosts were more likely to appear to facilitate the righting of a wrong than to lead an individual into damnation (Marshall 2010, pp.25-6). As a result of this failure by the Protestant church to take opportunistic possession of the ghost story, 'the effect of the Reformation was to de-theologize the ghost story, leaving it open to a range of creative and functional re-readings and retellings' (Marshall 2010, p.32). The official Protestant view also did not necessarily reflect the personal belief of the general populace, with Briggs claiming that 'remoter areas, notably Ireland and Scotland' were far slower in absorbing these new ideas (1977, p.29). As we shall see, the slower take up of these Protestant ideas in Scotland and Ireland would be part of a divide between these cultures and the English one with regard to the seasonal ghost story. The failure of the Protestant church to take control of the supernatural narrative meant that the ghost story remained a genre of the people, reflecting the people's understandings of spiritual matters, while also being open to use by conscious storytellers who would develop the ghost story tradition over the following centuries.

This included the use of the ghost and supernatural story by Shakespeare, whose most memorable connection to the ghost story for Christmas is probably in denying the connection between ghosts and the season. In *Hamlet*, Marcellus reminds Horatio that:

Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:
And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad (Act I, sc.1, 178-181)

However, Julia Briggs suggests that the proverb that 'ghosts never appear on Christmas Eve' actually reflected a wide-spread belief that they *did*, so the phrase instead had the meaning that 'the expected never happens' (1977, p.40). Similarly, as Catherine Belsey has pointed out, the fact that Marcellus and the guards are actually facing a ghost in winter places this narrative amongst the genre of 'winter's tales', a popular phrase of 'the period for far-fetched narratives and improbable fables' (2010, p.4). Other Shakespearean plays reinforce this tradition of seasonal supernatural storytelling, most

obviously *The Winter's Tale* itself, but also *Macbeth*, where Lady Macbeth describes her husband's vision of Banquo's ghost as 'A woman's story at a winter's fire' (*Macbeth*, Act III, sc.4, 64). The idea that supernatural narratives belong to the winter fireside is also found in Act Two of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, where Barabas' comments also gender seasonal storytelling,:

Now I remember those old women's words,
Who in my wealth would tell me winter's tales,
And speak of spirits and ghosts that glide by night
About the place where treasure hath been hid. (Act II, sc.1, 24-27)

The literary tradition thus not only recorded but also developed a folk tradition that continued in parallel to the literary developments. In 1621, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* recorded 'The ordinary recreations which we have in winter, and in some solitary times busy our minds with', a list which included 'merry tales of errant knights, queenes, lovers, lords, ladies, giants, dwarfes, theeves, cheaters, witches, fayries, goblins, friers, &c.' (quoted in Frodsham, 2008, p.138). Frodsham also notes that the 1740 book *Round About Our Coal Fire, or Christmas Entertainments* discusses festive entertainments of the early eighteenth century, including storytelling (2008, p.154). While this may not directly state that these were tales of the supernatural, it seems likely that these formed at least part of the storytelling repertoire. In part, this is because of the tradition which we have already outlined as leading up to this historical point, but it is also because of the traditions which followed, and which led to the Christmas ghost story tradition which we picture today. This tradition may even have extended into publishing, as *The Castle of Otranto*, generally acknowledged as one of the first if not the first Gothic novel, was published on Christmas Eve, 1764.

Such sociable festive entertainments continued into the nineteenth century, although they were increasingly seen as rural and antiquated. An 1827 article on 'Christmas Customs' for *The Mirror* magazine recorded that 'In the north [...] little lads and maidens assemble nightly at some neighbouring friend's to hear the goblin story' (W.H.H. 1827, p.444). The article goes on to quote a source named Grose who describes a country squire who entertained his tenants around a Christmas

fire, where they 'told and heard the *traditional tales of the village*, respecting *ghosts* and witches, till fear made them afraid to move' (quoted in W.H.H., 1827, p.445, emphasis in original). The same text is quoted by an 1865 article on Christmas celebrations, which refers to the squire as 'an independent gentleman in the reign of Queen Anne' (Anon. 1865, p.8), placing these celebrations and tale-tellings at the start of the eighteenth century. As we shall see, these rather nostalgic accounts of traditions of Christmas ghost tales shared amongst the community, hosted by their squire, were a significant influence on the development of the Christmas ghost story in the Victorian era, particularly with Washington Irving. However, it should be noted that, while there is ample textual evidence for the existence of these traditions of hospitality at Christmas, there is also evidence that they were more restricted than they may at first appear, being concentrated on developing community amongst the better-off tenants and neighbours, those who could be expected to behave appropriately, rather than being a general open house held by the wealthy to share their hospitality with any local or passing traveller (see Hutton 1994, p.242).

Nevertheless, a note of caution has to be sounded around these early appearances of Christmas ghost stories and what they tell us about the culture. It would be easy to romanticise them as remnants of some sort of true folk culture, but a moment's reflection would indicate some of the problems with this. The pieces that have been quoted here, whether from Shakespeare or Marlowe or the Gawain poet, are written down. They may draw upon or record elements of oral culture, but they are not entirely part of it; if they were, they would not survive. Not only that, but it is clear that the development of print and the spread of literacy itself influenced oral culture and folk practices, so that printed tales were retold orally, and amended to better fit the local culture. Some of these retold tales then were recorded by folklorists and lauded as the originals due to a romantic attachment to oral culture as a purer and older form.

What we can say is that there does appear to have been an ancient association of the period in midwinter with the dead, and with the supernatural. This seems to have developed into a tradition of wonder-tales which continued into the print era, where they became increasingly considered as something different from the literate culture of the wealthy and upper classes, and something to be modified, developed or laid aside according to personal taste and also shifting ideas about

entertainment as well as different roles in society. By the nineteenth century, these traditions were becoming part of the romanticised notions of recovering the roots of culture through recording oral traditions, practices which always seemed to happen at the edges of living memory, or just beyond. Whatever the truth about the importance, prevalence, or use of the supernatural story at Christmas, by the nineteenth century the telling of supernatural stories at Christmas was being identified as a long-standing tradition, and one that thus spoke to ideas of Englishness. In the unstable, rapidly-changing Victorian era, such alleged traditions were thus seen as even more important in retaining a sense of nationhood and shared culture. At the same time, however, they had to adapt to meet the specific needs of that changed culture.

Part of this adaptation came with the increasing move from an oral to a literate culture, across society. With the development of the Gothic romance in the mid-Eighteenth Century, popular commercial literature utilised folk beliefs and superstitions in their engagement with concerns about social stability, about change, about nation and gender and history. Elizabeth MacAndrew has demonstrated how the emulation of successful models, such as Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, led to the accumulation of a set of conventions as central to these romances, such as the way that 'a ghost became the conventional means of symbolizing a sense of guilt.' (1979, p.ix) This accretion of elements led to the development of a recognisable genre that was at the same time capable of wide variation, connected by particular tropes and conventions, not all of which needed to present in any one expression of the genre.

The Victorian Period

While we turn now to the time of Dickens, it is not yet the time to examine his role in the development of the ghost story, but rather to point out his relationship to existing traditions. In his 1850 essay 'A Christmas Tree', Dickens wrote of his memories of childhood Christmases. Alongside rather horrific images of the toys which haunted his imagination, he also describes a storytelling tradition, writing that 'we are telling Winter Stories - Ghost Stories, or more shame for us - round the Christmas fire' (Dickens 1850, p.293). Following this, he elaborates on the limited forms of hauntings, with examples, but notably sets them back in the time of Queen Charlotte and George III, who reigned

from 1760 to 1820. This establishes a link to the eighteenth century, as did the 'Christmas Customs' article of 1827 mentioned above, but also further back to the sixteenth. It is, after all, 'Winter Stories' that Dickens claims were being told around the family fire, and this phrase more than 'Ghost Stories' emphasises the connection to the supernatural found in the sixteenth century winter's tales.

However, there are significant shifts in the cultural context as well as in the specific use of the seasonal ghost story across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, leading to the Victorian Christmas ghost story. The development of the Gothic mode in fiction in the late-eighteenth century was associated with the development of individuality as well as with the Enlightenment ideas of rationalism. However, while these ideas may have seemed to offer a greater sense of individual power, separated from the concept of having been placed in a particular role in a God-created scheme, they instead allowed the individual to notice how they were controlled by purely human or natural forces and structures. The place of the individual in the grand scheme of things became confused, as the grand scheme came to be seen as more convoluted, less understandable, without a dominating force. And that was to assume that there was a grand scheme at all, and not just the randomness of the universe. As Punter puts it, 'Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising to find the emergence of a literature whose key motifs are paranoia, manipulation and injustice, and whose central project is understanding the inexplicable, the taboo, the irrational' (1996a, p.112).

Dickens was not the only Victorian author to write nostalgically of Christmas gone past. Washington Irving's 'Old Christmas' of 1820, part of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, tells of an American visitor to England who spends Christmas with the family of a squire who endeavours to revive historical customs in his area. As Nissenbaum has commented (1996, p.59), the representation of these attempts to revive old customs presents them as part of an attempt by a member of the gentry to control the local people. In particular, it is intended to guide them away from becoming involved in politics through exposure to newspapers and the developing reform movements by putting them in closer contact with the squire, and by having the squire provide, and thus control, their entertainment. However, as Irving points out, this attempt to use the entertainments for purposes of social control fails, because the populace are unwilling to be controlled in this way. Instead, they

subvert attempts at social regulation by returning to the carnivalesque behaviour of early Christmas celebrations, drinking, behaving lecherously, and mocking their social 'superiors'.

The entertainment presented at Bracebridge Hall includes a Christmas Day dinner which is followed by the parson, also an antiquarian, 'dealing forth strange accounts of popular superstitions and legends of the surrounding country, with which he had become acquainted in the course of his antiquarian researches' (Irving 1886, p.145). Not only does the telling of tales serve to connect people of different classes, disrupting some of the normal social boundaries, but here it also serves to reinforce the idea of the *local*. The people telling and listening to these stories are bound more closely to them and by them because they are the stories of that specific area, and so each individual with a family from the area can imagine a family connection to the stories. This then means that they have an additional connection, imagined or real, to the community. For Squire Bracebridge and his like this would have helped in their conservative desire to control the people by making them focus on the local rather than becoming involved in wider social issues.

There is also a rural and urban divide at work here. E.J. Clery argues that ghost stories in the eighteenth century were seen as things for the rural unsophisticate, which could benefit the urban sophisticate: 'A modern circle of aestheticised superstition would bear witness to the "boundless reign" of aesthetic experience, its ability to transcend the narrow dictates of reason and unite a scattered and anonymous readership with the power of its "heart-commanding" effect.' (p.5) However, urban society was unable to cross that divide, to appropriately aestheticise the rural narratives in order to use them to regain a sense of community. Yet, Clery goes on to say, by the early 19th century the ghost story was operating to bring together social groups, as it returned to commercialised fashion as an authored tale which could bring groups together to listen to one of them read the tales out loud.

This transition from oral culture to the authored tale presented orally was partly achieved through the development of the annual, which was introduced to Britain from Germany in 1822, with the first being *Forget Me Not: A Christmas and New Year's Present for 1823* (Alexander 1993, pp.412-3). The concept was picked up in the United States in 1825, with the publication of *The Atlantic Souvenir*, showing that the development of the Victorian Christmas was still very much a

transatlantic affair. These annuals presented largely original material and were intended as attractive gifts, which could then be displayed in the home for the delectation and entertainment of guests. Aimed at the successful middle classes, particularly at the women of the house, the annuals' 'contents were often sentimental and second-rate' and associated with domesticity and femininity (Alexander 1993, p.413). In this they emphasise bourgeois values in their provision of 'culture: literature, art, moral values' through illustration and fiction, as opposed to the more public, traditional 'folk' and practical values emphasised by the annual almanacs that preceded the development of the gift book (Nissenbaum 1996, p.143). And, as Alexander makes clear, in the annuals 'the Gothic - of a medieval or oriental variety - is staple fare' (1993, p.413). Ghost stories were appearing in these publications at least as far back as 1825, when *The Forget-Me-Not* annual carried 'The Regretted Ghost' by Mrs Hofland. Indeed, by 1877 a reviewer could note 'what collection of Christmas stories would be considered complete without a large percentage of ghostly tales?' (Anon. 1877, p.1559), while by 1895 one reviewer of *Hood's Annual* recorded that it included 'another of the inevitable Christmas ghost stories' (Anon. 1895, p.13), indicating a certain amount of weariness with the matching of genre and season.

Dickens' own contributions to the idea of the traditional Christmas, and to the Christmas ghost story tradition, are so well covered that they need only scant attention here. The connection begins with *The Pickwick Papers* in 1837, where 'Christmas [specifically Christmas Eve] at Dingley Dell provides the perfect opportunity for the cosy fireside tale of the goblins who stole a sexton' (Briggs 1977, p.39). As Briggs points out, one of the particular features of Christmas as an appropriate setting for a supernatural tale of redemption is that it provides an appropriate timeline for events. Thus, the sexton Gabriel Grub undergoes his supernatural trial on Christmas Eve and awakens to redemption on Christmas Day. This same pattern is followed by Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol in Prose. Being A Ghost Story of Christmas*, published in 1843, where 'in drawing an obvious contrast between Scrooge's graceless Christmas Eve and his salvation with all mankind on Christmas morning, it celebrates the power of doomed but holy innocence (through the figure of Tiny Tim) to redeem and bless the sinner' (Briggs 1977, p.40).

It is clear, though, that *A Christmas Carol*, despite its undoubted significance, was simply part of an ongoing and current tradition of Christmas ghost stories. This is alluded to in the story's subtitle, *A Ghost Story of Christmas*, although this perhaps more strongly indicates that the ghost story takes place *at* Christmas. However, Christmas ghost stories were already being published in the periodicals at this time, and referring to existing traditions of Christmas ghost story telling. For example, Henry Curling's 'Christmas Eve: The Story of a Skull' was published in January 1843; *A Christmas Carol* would not appear until December of the same year. Curling's story begins with the narrator being invited to an old-fashioned Christmas in a Yorkshire country mansion, though one where the guests are almost all members of the family, with the narrator being the main exception. Even so, 'there were all sorts of revels, masques, games, dances, and even a play', practices which are seen as 'fast fading away in merrie England, even from our remembrance!' (Curling 1843, p.53) After these revelries, 'the story-telling commenced' and 'many and awful were the ghostly stories and withered murders then and there recounted' (Curling 1843, p.53). This then leads into the ghost story proper, a story of a vengeful skull set in 1616, at Christmas time. It is a story where the supernatural has little real presence; the skull provides physical evidence of a murder which allows the protagonist to realise that there has been a wrongdoing, and the skull's movement to catch the protagonist's attention is caused by a toad sat within it. But there is a sense that justice is being done here, and the gravedigger who provides the protagonist with the additional information that he needs to bring the murderer to justice is proven right in his belief that he will bury the younger man before long, as he dies in the course of the story. More significant for this study, though, are the story's title and its inclusion of the telling of Christmas ghost stories, all supporting the idea that this was a recognised tradition.

The publication of *A Christmas Carol* was not only followed by four other Christmas supernatural stories by Dickens, but also supported by his editorship of *All the Year Round* and *Household Words*. In the special Christmas issues of these periodicals he not only wrote essays such as 'A Christmas Tree', with its memory of Christmas ghost stories past, but could also present seasonal supernatural tales from other writers, such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, Rosa Mulholland and Amelia Edwards. Dickens himself provided the framework for these stories, to the extent of requesting specific narratives from specific authors in order to fulfil his detailed

requirements, although he frequently failed to receive what he actually wanted (Glancy 1980, p.58). However, his active promotion of the Christmas ghost story as editor makes him significant, regardless of his own achievements in the field. His role as editor is also particularly significant as a means of spreading what Andrew Smith has identified as Dickens' innovative approach to the ghost story, which was to dismiss the folk-type narrative where a living person meets a dead person and that disruption is the point, and instead turn the ghost story into an allegorical form, one which said something about society (2010, p.33).

Punter has claimed that 'Dickens precisely takes up the mundane and, either by addition of the supernatural or more usually by habitual grotesquerie and caricature, converts it into a subject for terror', (1996a, p.189) producing Gothic stories even when untouched by the supernatural. The author used the techniques developed through Gothic fiction to maintain the interest and engagement of the reader of the serialised text, recognising fear as a particularly effective way to gain this engagement within the confines of a published episode. The 'grotesquerie and caricature' of the Gothic frequently finds itself employed in television adaptations of Dickens, often filtered through the engravings of Doré, whether these are the supernatural tales or not.

It is also worth noting that Dickens' stories rapidly became attractions beyond their initial publication medium, and an opportunity for developing and spreading technologies and the imagery of the ghost tale. Terry Castle, in tracing the history of the phantasmagoria, notes that 'Wraithlike actors and actresses, reflected from below the stage, mingled with onstage counterparts in a phantasmagorical version of Dickens' "The Haunted Man" on Christmas Eve, 1862' (1995, p.151). However, the review of the production in *The Observer* is dated 21 June 1863. This review is not particularly favourable towards the production, considering it to have been produced 'chiefly for the purpose of exhibiting Professor Pepper's clever adaptation of Mr Dirk's recent invention for the production of spectral illusions' (Anon. 1863a, p.5). This illusion, now typically known as 'Pepper's Ghost', used mirrors and bright lights in order to present the appearance of ghostly figures on stage; in other words, the play was considered by this reviewer to be primarily intended to show off its special effects. While the reviewer mentions the provenance of *The Haunted Man* as a Christmas story, no

consideration is made of the relevance of this to its supernatural narrative, or to its being shown in June.

However, there were stage shows of a ghostly and phantasmagorical nature shown at Christmas during this period, indicating that there was still a social element to a good horror show for the season. For example, an 1863 article on 'The Christmas Face of London' describes how the children 'are clamorous for the appearance of the ghost at the Polytechnic, hailing his apparition with shuddering delight, which dissolves by degrees into saucy familiarity' (Anon. 1863b, p.808). This referred once again to the 'Pepper's Ghost' illusion. This was not the only supernatural feature of the season. Regarding Highbury Barn, the reviewer for *The Observer* recorded that 'The festive season has not been neglected here, for a novelty in the shape of a ghost spectacle is announced, entitled "Bush Demandi"', while at the Polygraphic Hall 'Mr. and Mrs. Killiott Galer give, we believe, their new entertainment, "Cousin Kate and the Haunted Mill," throughout the holidays' (Anon. 1863c, p.7).

The Victorian period sees the progressive development of domestication and embourgeoiseification, applying to both work and leisure. Increased industrialisation combined with legislation so that lives were increasingly lived to the timetables set by employers rather than to fit with any scheme encouraged by family, community or nature. At the same time, as Matthew Sweet has it, 'there was a switch from locally-generated activities and community-based entertainments to increasingly officialised ones: national cricket and football leagues, public swimming baths, dance clubs, museums, exhibitions, arcade games, ticket-only entertainment events' (2001, p.4). As this list suggests, entertainment became more controlled, and more commercialised, with entry and membership not only policed, but charged for.

To this list we could add the increasing importance of periodicals and magazines in providing domestic entertainment. A number of factors came into play here, including increased education and levels of literacy, increased leisure time, removals of taxes affecting newspapers (such as stamp and excise duty on paper and taxes on advertising), and improved transport and communication technologies. This also allowed an increasing dominance of London over English and, ultimately, British life, so that Fleet Street could be considered the home of a national press by the end of the nineteenth century. This meant the spread of London attitudes and ideas throughout Britain, and an

increasing sense of national identity, with an associated impact upon local or regional identity, although it should be noted that the number of local newspapers also increased dramatically in this period. This led to a tension between nation and locality, providing options for people to follow, whether to look to London's idea of the nation, or to concentrate on what was happening locally, or to strike a personal balance somewhere between.

According to Briggs, the ghost story attained its 'golden age' between 1850 and 1930, marked in terms of sheer popularity. She attributes this with the massive growth of fiction periodicals during this period, periodicals which were desperate for content, particularly considering the breadth of tastes that they had to accommodate across their varied audiences. The primary audience, though, was middle-class, who Briggs claims 'liked to read of familiar settings transformed by a sudden eruption of crime, violence or the supernatural' (1977, p.14). So, while other stories might refer to the romance of the aristocracy, or the horrors of the poor, the ghost and crime stories served to bring the horrors of the outside world into the cosy, familiar middle-class environment, and so can be understood as warning tales. Typically, what they warn of is any behaviour which could be considered objectionable to middle-class tastes, and of failing to live up to the values and appearance of the class. This is particularly significant in that, as Briggs notes, 'Several of the periodicals were intended for reading aloud to the whole family, which might consist of young and old of both sexes' (1977, p.14). Briggs uses this point to emphasise the appropriateness of the ghost story because it provided a straightforward dramatic narrative which could be presented simply and understood by the whole family. However, this environment is also the perfect one for the presentation of educative moral tales, even when disguised in the form of sensational narratives.

As Caroline Sumpter has stated, in relation to the Victorian approach to the fairy tale, 'We owe the myth of orality as a marker of authenticity to the nineteenth century' (2008, p.4). In other words, the romantic conception that simply by being a story told by a person, particularly a person perceived as rural and uneducated, rather than recorded in print meant that the story was more likely to be authentically traditional. Such stories would therefore tell the reader or researcher more about the 'true' nature of, for example, the English national character, and be more closely connected to the ancient ways of the country. This idea can be seen in Dickens' and Irving's connection of the telling of

tales with other ancient traditions, and can also be found in later ghost stories which present the telling of ghostly tales at Christmas as somehow traditional. The sense of tradition is significant in the way that it establishes a particular connection between the reader and the culture, between the present and the past. By telling a tale, in the traditional manner, the storyteller draws themselves and their listeners out of the modern world of print or media and back into an older way of relating to society.

The relevance of this to seasonal ghost stories lies in the changes in traditions and ideas of celebration that these developments in the press encouraged. Even where the press was apparently supporting the continuation of traditions, it did so in a way which led to change. For example, we have seen how Dickens celebrated the old tradition of telling ghost stories at Christmas, and that he developed and supported this idea in his own writing, stories 'intended as family entertainment, to be read aloud to an assembled party of young and old, like that at Dingley Dell' (Briggs 1977, p.41). However, this very act of reading *Dickens'* story aloud changes the dynamic of the ghost story telling. No longer is this a local tale, told in an individual way by a particular person in their specific context to a particular audience; instead, it is the reading out of Charles Dickens' narrative (or that of any other author) to a number of different audiences all assumed to be much the same. Individual readings will certainly have differed in performance, in exactly when and where the presentation took place, in whether or not the reader read all of the words exactly as written. However, the overall effect is that a wide dispersed audience were receiving the same story in the same words, rather than individual, localised social groups sharing their own stories in their own way.

The switch of focus from the community to the family is also a shift from needy adults to children as the recipients of generosity. Where once the inversion of the social hierarchy was in the poor and needy being served and provided for by the rich and powerful, the Victorian era saw children as the powerless who assumed a central position of power at Christmastime. The power relations now, though, were within the family, rather than within a local society. Obviously this does not mean that charity was not extended to those outside the family, but even in *A Christmas Carol* we are presented with a final image of Scrooge, not as the benevolent employer (although he has apparently become that), but as a lonely but economically powerful man accepted into the hearts and home of his family. Despite the image promoted by numerous adaptations of the story, in Dickens'

novella, it is Scrooge's own family that he spends Christmas with, joining his nephew's Christmas dinner, and not the Cratchits. As Nissenbaum observes, Scrooge buys a turkey which is delivered to the Cratchits by the shop, rather than delivering it himself, thereby maintaining the appropriate separation between employer and employee (1996, p.225). This also emphasises that Christmas was a time of commerce as much as family, as the shop was open to sell the turkey in the first place and Scrooge and Cratchit are both at work the following day.

A Christmas Carol demonstrates Dickens' concern with the division between rich and poor, between the haves and the have-nots in society. It does so through an appeal to the individual's spiritual well-being, and calls, essentially, for a form of considerate capitalism. It is not making money that is criticised, for this is the powerhouse of society; it is not using the money for good, to bring pleasure and happiness to people, that is criticised. Even more so, it is being out of touch with other people that is shown to cause misery, as the poor, though clerical-class, family of Bob Cratchit are shown to be happy because of their mutually-supportive, loving relationship with each other. Scrooge is encouraged to live life to the full rather than to die miserable and alone.

This concern for the condition of the poor is presented as being good for Scrooge's moral well-being, and so reflects a certain moralistic strain of Victorian writing. Briggs argues that

All his [Dickens'] stories specially written for this season, but above all *A Christmas Carol*, are inspired by their author's sense of Christianity as ideally an active and integrative force in society, the profoundest link between man and his fellowmen. His phantoms and spectres, like those of *The Family Reunion*, employ the terrors of spiritual isolation to persuade men to rejoin the Christian community as active members. (1977, p.210)

However, Victorian society's concern with class was not simply about how 'doing good' could be good for the souls of the middle classes. Instead, 'up to and including 1848, class conflicts led to sensations in which the main emotion generated was fear' (Diamond 2003, p.41). 1848 saw the high point of the Chartist movement, which combined with the revolutions on the Continent to stir up fears

of similar revolt in Britain. Fear of class-based social unrest rose again in the 1880s, with the growth of socialist movements. Riots in Leicester and in London's West End in 1886 showed that this movement aimed to attack the very heart of British wealth and privilege. In the face of this, the issue of keeping workers satisfied, rather than impoverished and resentful, clearly arose within the ranks of the industrial and mercantile employers, the class into which we can readily fit Scrooge.

As Nissenbaum points out, '*A Christmas Carol* addressed the relationship of the well-to-do not with the faceless poor but with the poor who were personally known and whose predicament might provoke pangs of conscience' (1996, p.225). So *A Christmas Carol* presents a spiritual intervention to protect an individual from loneliness and from the potential of unrest; Scrooge is driven to become a better family man and a better employer and businessman, increasing goodwill with his employee and his customers by extending better terms and conditions. What he does not become is a self-sacrificing beneficiary to all society. Nissenbaum argues that the threat that is faced in *A Christmas Carol* is one that stems from the significant change in social structure that occurs in Scrooge's lifetime, away from the master and apprentice structure that Scrooge experienced with Old Fezziwig. This ancient form of business was replaced with the employer-employee relationship that Scrooge shares with Cratchit, one which separated the two socially as well as economically. Where an apprentice was likely to live with and share in the social life of his master, to some extent, an employee was a separate individual. The increased individuality and domesticity of society thereby changed the relationships between its various members, but also the rituals of Christmas, and other events, which provided a shared identity.

This separation between employer and worker was necessary to preserve the decorum expected of the middle classes. The romanticised view of the Middle Ages popularised throughout the Victorian age presented a society in which everyone knew their place in the feudal order, and the world itself was ordered by word of God. For the modern Victorian world, position was no longer as certain, and the threat of fall from moral, spiritual and social position particularly troubled those of the middle class, who could seem both distant yet all-too-close to the working class beneath them, and the criminal classes lower still. From 1867 one of the key fears affecting British society was the growth of Fenian terrorism, spreading to the mainland partly through the influence of Irish Americans who had

gained experience through the American Civil War. 13 November 1887 saw the Bloody Sunday riots, where the demons of socialism and Ireland combined in mass protest at the treatment of an Irish Nationalist MP, William O'Brien. Police charges led to mass casualties and two fatalities. This attitude coloured supernatural and crime fiction. Diamond has described 'one of the great themes of Victorian melodrama: London as the most sinful as well as the greatest city in the world' (2003, p.234). This is seen in the novels of Dickens, the engravings of Doré, as well as the sensation plays of Dion Boucicault, and many other works, and can be considered part of the development of a more urban Gothic. By showing the beautiful, stately, modern city to also have its own doppelgänger in the broken-down, sin-ridden slums, and also to show that the elegance and beauty could conceal evil thoughts and deeds, the city itself became something of a Gothic character through these cultural products.

The later Victorian era continued the association of Christmas and ghost stories, following on from Dickens' lead in presenting this connection as something traditional. In 1857, Margaret Oliphant's 'A Christmas Tale' for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* presented a Gothic tale of inheritance and mounting unease which is ultimately revealed to be nothing but a nightmare. Even more significantly, there is nothing about the story, other than the title, to link it to Christmas, unless it is accepted that the ghost story is particularly tied to that time of year.

This form of ghost story as traditional at Christmas was returned to by Oliphant in 1880, but this time with a sense of criticism. 'Earthbound: A Story of the Seen and Unseen' presented a family passing Christmas in mourning, who even so attempt to entertain themselves and their guests with traditional Christmas pastimes: 'The commonplace ghost-stories which are among the ordinary foolishnesses of Christmas did not suit with the more serious tone in which their thoughts flowed' (Oliphant 1880, pp.404-405). Nevertheless, the older people discuss uncanny feelings, while the younger talk about 'those new-fangled fancies which have replaced that old favorite lore', spiritualism (Oliphant 1880, p.405). Oliphant thus gives a view of celebrations where the telling of ghost stories is an old tradition, as Dickens and Irving positioned it, providing a setting for her own ghostly tale in relating it to these traditions without indicating that they mean any belief in the supernatural.

Victorian sentimental novelist Rhoda Broughton also wrote short stories for the periodicals, including

ghost stories, five of which were collected in 1873 as *Tales for Christmas Eve*, again emphasising the association between the season and the ghost story.

However, alongside the sense of the tradition of the Christmas ghost story signalled by Broughton's anthology title there is also an indication in Oliphant's and other's stories of a revived interest and belief in the supernatural in the engagement with spiritualism, and the mention of older feelings that indicate something beyond the materialistic and rational, even while 'The older people, indeed, unhesitatingly rejected all mediums and supernatural operators of every kind as imposters' (Oliphant 1880, p.405). Jennifer Bann sees the popularity of spiritualism in the later nineteenth century as aiding the change in the approach to ghosts in fiction. She claims that 'In the supernatural fiction of the later nineteenth century, death began to bring freedom: shackles, silence, and regret were cast aside, and ghosts became active figures empowered rather than constrained by their deaths' (Bann 2009, p.664). In other words, the figure of the ghost shifts from being one that is constrained by its death, paying penance for its sins in life, to one that has been freed from the shackles of daily trials and its physical body. It is this process of development and change in the seasonal ghost story that allowed its survival. As well as representing something traditional, it could also be used in newer forms, with new approaches, in order to engage more with new social concerns and patterns. This is how it survived from the social tale to the domestic, from the feudal winter's tale to the Dickensian family ghost story. It is also how it adapted to the next form of the ghost story: the psychological.

While not typically considered as a Christmas ghost story, Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* was first published in *Colliers* magazine in January to April 1898 as a response to a request for 'something seasonable by the promoters of a periodical' (James 1986, p.37). The tale itself, like many Christmas ghost stories, is not set at the festive season, but it is framed as being a narrative that is told as the result of a round of Christmas Eve ghost story telling, 'to emphasize the traditional elements of his tale further, [...] in a deliberate reminiscence of the Dickensian Christmas numbers' (Briggs 1977, p.151). Similarly, Edith Nesbit's 'The Shadow' begins with the telling of ghost stories following a Christmas dance; not only that, but it was originally published in the 23 December 1905 issue of *Black and White*, as 'The Portent of the Shadow'. Susan Hill's 1983 homage to the Victorian ghost story, and to *The Turn of the Screw* in particular, *The Woman in Black*, begins with the telling of ghost

stories at a family Christmas. One character claims that this is 'Just the thing for Christmas Eve. It's an ancient tradition!' (Hill 2011, p.14) It is this telling of fictional tales within an established tradition which inspires the narrator to set down his memories of his encounter with the vengeful spirit of the title.

A number of important factors are included in these depictions of Christmas, particularly in the way that they follow on from and develop Dickens' idealised Christmas. Firstly, these Christmases are domestic, and focused around the family more than the community gathering headed by the local gentry that Irving described. They are therefore more enclosed, more separated from the wider community. While this may be a result of the bourgeoisieification of society that Dickens observed, and is similar to the sort of celebrations of Christmas that Dickens himself writes about, it is not the same socially-concerned family that his Christmas stories sought to encourage. *A Christmas Carol* encouraged a benevolent capitalism through a story that could be shared with the family, possibly by being read aloud by the *pater familias*. But the concerns of most of the Christmas ghost stories that followed are not for social causes, but are personal.

This domesticisation could also be seen as a feminisation of society and social concerns. This would fit with the idea that the Gothic had a particularly feminine appeal, and that women were considered to be the 'sensation-seeking' members of the Victorian public. Criminal trials were popular with women during the Victorian period, whether through the press or in personal attendance at the courts, suggesting that these were perceived as a form of entertainment rather like the sensational stories in the magazines or the sensational plays of the theatre. This was treated with much disapproval by male journalists and commentators, who perceived this interest in the criminal, the uncivilised, the bloody, the sexual as unladylike, insufficiently delicate, and therefore as a risk to the social structure. However, it also suggests the increased freedom for women to engage with such interests openly, and the desire to do so. The sensation novels, which frequently focused on strong and independent female characters, were often written by women for women, who made up the majority of novel readers. As women were developing new ideas about their place in society, so 'The sensation novel provided an outlet for resentments that were expressed more openly in the "New Woman" novels of the 1890s' (Diamond 2003, p.5).

Indeed, the ghost story has been seen as itself taking a more domestic focus during the later Victorian period. Jennifer Bann (2009), for example, has indicated how the influence of spiritualist ideas moves the depiction of the fictional ghost towards a more personalised interaction, with concerns related to those experienced in life. Ghosts become more tied to normal events in life, and to the home, and particularly to the home of the middle-class readership rather than to the aristocratic castle of the original Gothic novels. Indeed, in many of these ghost stories it is the ordinariness of the spectral figure which is commented on, its seeming fitness in its domestic setting, with only some slight oddity leading to a sense of unease.

The spiritualist movement in general was connected to socially progressive ideals. Indeed, while spiritualism may have been based around the idea of connecting to the dead past, it also offered a platform for looking forward, through 'innumerable pamphlets, periodicals, and lecture tours presenting spirit-guided views on the moral direction of humanity's future' (Bann 2009, p.683). In this we can see an echo of the personal and social warning presented in *A Christmas Carol*, in which knowledge of the past and the present allows the spirits to present a horrifying vision of Scrooge's future, and, by extension, the future for all who follow the same pattern of behaviour.

The Twentieth Century

The Christmas ghost story has gone through several waves of popularity, as should already be clear. While it was popularised by Dickens, by the early twentieth century the tradition was beginning to wane, as an article from 1901 suggests, claiming that 'Even the ghost-story has had its day as an inevitable attribute of Christmas festivity' (Owen 1901, p.10). Granted, this is a particularly cynical article, something which has itself seemingly become a tradition of Christmas periodicals. As later writers would do, Owen decries the press of the streets, the commercialism, the ease of travel to sunnier climes rather than gathering as a family, and the loss of tradition, in particular the absence of the Spirit of Christmas in terms of giving to those less fortunate. However, he balances this with a sense that things in general are better, that this 'Spirit of Christmas' has actually spread throughout the year, with charity giving becoming more of a constant than something done but once a year, and with

a spread of modern rationalism even to the children being the reason for the decline in the popularity of the stocking, and of the ghost story.

By 1902, the idea that Christmas ghost stories were distinctly old-fashioned was beginning to take hold. W.Pett Ridge wrote of the formula for Christmas stories for *The English Illustrated Magazine*:

The old recipe for Christmas stories was to take a country house, sprinkle with snow, flavour with hot punch, garnish with visitors and stick a ghost in it, serving the whole in a state calculated to congeal the very blood in the consumer's veins. Nowadays, introduction of ice is looked on as old-fashioned, and no good cook would send a story up cold. Folk are beginning to have doubts concerning ghosts; any suggestion of wine is calculated to give grievous offence to intemperate teetotallers. (1902, p.313)

Indeed, Ridge presents the tastes of the new century as being decidedly rational, if still somewhat attached to the love story. By 1913 at least there appears to have been a sense that it was time to modernise and move on from these Christmas traditions, with the review of the Christmas annuals in *The Manchester Guardian* for that year noting that:

Christmas numbers are breaking away slowly from tradition. Some have taken the bit between their teeth, and give you a blaze of fine colour work by the front rank of modern illustrators that is not less welcome because it might as well appear in midsummer; others compromise by offering you both this and the familiar grocers' calendar picture with ghost stories and rhymes about plum pudding as accompaniment. (Anon. 1913b, p.16)

For this reviewer, the Christmas ghost story is clearly something old fashioned that's time has passed, much as Owen had it twelve years earlier. This attitude continued into the years of the First World War. In 1915, once again a writer for *The Manchester Guardian* presented 'Christmas Old Style and

New', with the old style, recognised as still being dominant, being that convivial familial and social occasion presented by Dickens and his ilk. The new style, however, was perceived as coming in with the late Victorians, and the change is presented primarily in terms of Christmas literature: 'Christmas stories, too, began to sell badly. The haunted castle fell entirely out of fashion' (Anon. 1915, p.11). Yet this view was clearly not one that was entirely representative, and there were certainly areas where the ghost story retained its popularity as a Christmas entertainment. One of the individuals who would be responsible for the revival of the ghost story, and its continuation as a tradition, was the antiquarian M.R.James.

M.R.James and After

The modern association of M.R.James with the Christmas ghost story stems at least in part from the adaptation of several of his stories for the *Ghost Stories for Christmas* strand for the BBC in the 1970s, for more on which see chapter 5. However, the association of James with Christmas ghost stories developed from his practice of telling his stories to colleagues and students at Christmas gatherings while at King's College, Cambridge as Provost. James had been reading his ghost stories to colleagues since 1893, in October of which he read 'Canon Alberic's Scrapbook' and 'Lost Hearts' to the Chitchat Club (Pfaff 1980, p.114). This was a literary society which aimed to promote rational conversation, an interesting aim to consider with regard to the telling of ghost stories which represent a failing of the rational to accommodate a supernatural reality. But the direct association of his stories with Christmas does not appear until a little before he became Provost at King's in 1905, and so responsible for a Christmas party. Pfaff records of this party that 'The high points were invariable from year to year: the choristers' tea, Christmas Eve dinner in Hall during which the Choral Scholars sang, the reading of a ghost story the same evening' (1980, p.216). One King's scholar noted in 1904 that a ghost story was read on most evenings of the lead-up to Christmas, including two from James and another two from Arthur Benson (Pfaff 1980, p.216, note 10).

American author and essayist Michael Chabon has described James as 'about as English as it is possible for an English writer to be' (2010, p.111). Part of this Englishness lies in this practice of telling ghost stories at Christmas, an activity which Chabon describes with affectionate disbelief. He

notes that, at the English Christmas, ‘it is apparently traditional to sit by a crackling yule fire and scare one’s friends out of their wits. (And it would be hard to imagine anything more English than that)’ (Chabon 2010, p.111). While Chabon does not elaborate on this, his comment suggests a stereotype of Englishness where affection is not expressed directly, but rather through other emotional engagements. The deep emotion of scaring someone and of being scared by a friend is thus seen as a way of engaging with them in an intense way without having to use words of affection. It depends upon individuals feeling comfortable enough in each other’s company to allow themselves to be vulnerable to expressing fear, and also to attempt to engage with the other’s emotions by causing them fear, something which also requires sufficient knowledge of the person to tell what will frighten them.

There is something significant in the ghost story writers of the period who were academics. This included James, Augustus Jessopp (who co-edited an edition of the life of William of Norwich by Thomas of Monmouth with James), R.H.Malden, A.N.L.Munby, Arthur (A.C.) Benson, and his brothers, R.C. and E.F.. The latter, E.F.Benson, was a member of the Chitchat Club where James first read his horror tales, as was King’s College chaplain E.G.Swain, another occasional writer of supernatural fiction. Not only that, but it was the Bensons’ father, Archbishop Edward White Benson, who provided Henry James with the core idea that would become *The Turn of the Screw*. The shared experiences of these academics may well have drawn them to a particular style or approach to the ghost story, one which led to Jonathan Miller’s conception of the M.R.James type of ghost story as stemming from a mind unused to the realities of the world, including associations with women. This conception was put forward through the very successful adaptation of ‘Oh, Whistle and I’ll Come to You, My Lad’ for the BBC arts programme *Omnibus* in 1968, a programme which has been claimed as inspiration for the *Ghost Story for Christmas* strand.

However, this idea of James and his type is one based on stereotypes, and possibly on Miller’s own experience of Cambridge dons. Like his adaptation, it relates to the source material, James’ story or his biography, only in broad outlines and individual points, and only rarely in the detail. An alternative reading is suggested by Catherine Spooner in her analysis of the BBC supernatural series *Sea of Souls*, which she associates explicitly with the academic ghost stories of M.R.James, including their BBC adaptations in the *Ghost Story for Christmas* strand, because of the

academic setting and the 'representational subtlety' of at least the earlier episodes of the series (2010, p.176). What Spooner suggests about academic supernatural series and stories is that they represent not a disconnection between the 'ivory tower' of academia and the wider culture, but instead demonstrate the way that academia is concerned with helping society understand its hauntings, while at the same time being condemned to a status more as observers and interpreters than as active resolvers of issues (2010, pp.176-177). Andrew Smith reads this presentation of the academic in James' stories rather more negatively, as the lack of emotional affect in the expression of the narratives suggests a failure to truly engage with the horrific events which are being narrated, suggesting 'an amoral lack of empathy' (2010, p.8). A more generous view might be that this is actually a professional detachment that is required as part of that role as 'observers and interpreters', a role which presents the narrator / academic in the position of a ritual guide, suggesting ways for the audience to work through the issues symbolised by the haunting.

One of the notable differences between the ghosts of M.R.James' stories and those of the majority of other representations in the Victorian and Edwardian period is that they are distinctly physical rather than ethereal. In this, James is borrowing from the medieval depictions of ghosts, which the medieval manuscripts name as such. These are physical returns from the grave, what we might now term revenants or even zombies, showing the signs of decay and decomposition. In her examination of the influences on Shakespeare's winter's tales, Catherine Belsey points to medieval church paintings and the tale which they accompanied of three living kings who meet three dead kings who warn them of their mortality (2010, p.12). She also indicates the local ghost stories recorded by a monk of Byland Abbey, ghost stories that were transcribed for the *English Historical Review* by none other than M.R.James. The ghosts of these particular stories are directly connected to those of the church paintings of the three dead kings, with Belsey's translation of the original Latin describing a ghost encountered by Snowball the tailor as 'horrible and emaciated, in the likeness of one of the dead painted kings'. These ghosts are also shape-shifters, 'consistently palpable and physically threatening' (Belsey 2010, p.14).

Within James' collected ghost stories these physical manifestations appear, frequently decaying, with an amorphousness of body that suggests both the softness of a decomposing body and

a demonic shape-shifting ability. The disturbed guardian of 'The Treasure of Abbot Thomas' is experienced by a treasure-seeker as giving off 'a most horrible smell of mould, and of a cold kind of face pressed against my own, and moving slowly over it, and of several - I don't know how many - legs or arms or tentacles or something clinging to my body' (James 1992, p.176). This recalls another of the medieval ghost stories that James transcribed from the Byland manuscript, where 'a woman caught a specter and brought it into the house on her back. One of the bystanders noticed that her hands sank deep into its flesh, as if it were putrid, and not solid but phantasmic' (Belsey 2010, p.20). These figures thus exist on the boundary of the physical and the ethereal, the living and the dead, the human and the demonic.

H.P.Lovecraft was therefore in error when he stated that James had invented 'a new kind of ghost' (1994, p.61). James was more accurately reviving a rather more ancient type of ghost than the disembodied spirit of the Gothic texts. However, Lovecraft was correct in stating the significance of the physicality of James' ghosts, not least because the thing is 'usually *touched* before it is *seen*' (1994: 62). We can think here not only of the guardian of 'The Treasure of Abbot Thomas', but also particularly of what the cursed Dunning finds when he reaches beneath his pillow in search of matches in 'Casting the Runes': 'What he touched was, according to his account, a mouth, with teeth, and with hair about it, and, he declares, not the mouth of a human being' (James 1992, p.252). As with the sheeted ghost of 'Oh Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad', the specific fears related to this supernatural visitation are not just its appearance in an unexpected place, but its appearance in the very place that we are supposed to hide when fearful of ghosts: in bed, under the covers.

One of the reasons that Christmas is popular for supernatural tales is that the family gathering is enhanced by the school holidays, particularly when the tradition of upper- and wealthy middle-class British parents sending their children away to boarding school is taken into account. James' stories told to the King's choristers could be seen as part of a series of ritualistic events marking the end of term and the start of the holidays, a change of status from pupil to child. Thus, children's supernatural literature contains many tales that take place at the Christmas holidays, such as *The Children of Green Knowe* and *The Box of Delights*. These stories marked a break from the everyday drudgery of school and a return to the wonder of family, although they also often included children spending the holiday

with previously unknown relatives to add to the sense of adventure into the unknown. This model was replicated with the transferral of many of these stories to television, typically as serials leading up to Christmas, as with John Masefield's 1935 novel *The Box of Delights*, which was televised as part of ITV's *Storybox* in 1962, dramatised or read for BBC radio in 1966, 1969, 1977, 1996, and memorably adapted for BBC television with screenings in 1984 and 1986, all at Christmas time.

The revival of the ghost story in this period could be connected to the traumas of the First World War. The period after the First World War was a particularly strong one for the development of interest in spiritualism, which is often accounted for by the massive loss of life experienced during that conflict. It also relates to the changes in society, the drive towards the material and the mechanistic, that would provide the drive towards modernism in art and literature at the opposite end of the spectrum of responses. There was no escaping from the scientific view of the world, but spiritualism sought to rationalise belief in the supernatural, to approach it scientifically.

At the same time that the trauma of war and the massive loss of family encouraged a resurgence in spiritualism, its horrors meant that the ghost story could appear trivial, childish, unable to approach the terrors of reality. Briggs suggests that the scientific horrors unleashed during the First World War diverted fear away from the psychological to 'scientific, even futuristic horrors, created by modern technology and exploited either by man or against him, or both' (1977, p.165). This view suggests that the growing development of science fiction after the First World War, even if it was not immediately known by that name, comes from this shift in the source of social and cultural nightmares. No longer was society concerned with the horrors of the individual mind, but with the fear of mechanised society, and industrial-scale death, of depersonalisation by science. These were the moral and social transgressions that literature would reflect, and they would tend to be reflected on a massive scale; for example, Karel Čapek's *Rossum's Universal Robots* of 1920 would present the mechanisation of work through the use of artificial humans, resulting in the complete destruction of the human race. Briggs also notes that one problem that arose in the period after the First World War was that the growing awareness of psychology and of the Freudian interpretation of art and literature led artists to be much more careful about their creations, lest they reveal too much to the attention of critics (1977, p.178).

While there are certainly some strong signs of a revival of the ghost story after the First World War, the caution that Briggs sounds about the mechanisation of culture driving it out can also be supported. Once again, the tradition was seen by some as being played out. One *Manchester Guardian* journalist commented in 1926 that 'It is always well to have something about ghosts at Christmas-time, but unfortunately the possibilities of the English variety are just about exhausted' ('Lucio' 1926, p.7). This sense of the genre being over-played may have stemmed in part from these stories spreading from the periodicals to the new medium of radio in the 1920s, as will be examined in the next chapter.

Spiritualism may also have played a part in the softening of the ghost story, away from terror and towards sentiment. For example, in 1913, a writer for *The Manchester Guardian* proposed that it is natural to think about a supposed haunting 'at Christmas-time, for Christmas is a festival of love which everyone celebrates according to his own way of loving, and with nearly all of us, at any rate as we grow older, love longs to span the gulf between this and an unseen world' (Anon. 1913a, p.6). This connects the ideals of a Christian Christmas, as propagated through the works of Dickens and his ilk, with the desire to connect with those who have died. Love for the living is not enough, but love for those no longer living is also to be encouraged, and this requires making some connection with the dead. In a broader sense, then, this attitude sees Christmas as an echo of pagan festivals of the dead, not as some sort of continued tradition, but simply because the season itself is appropriate for such considerations. Obviously, the writer here is thinking that the Christian message of love for all mankind is particularly strong at a festival of Christ, but the extension of this love into the afterlife, particularly as connected here with an increased sense of individual mortality 'as we grow older', suggests that there is something peculiar about this season and death. However, after the First World War, this desire to reconnect with lost loved ones was something that would become much more widespread, encouraging the turn to spiritualism.

If we accept that Enlightenment thought is a drive not only towards the rational understanding of nature, but also towards the mastery of nature, then the significance of supernatural tales and their irruptions of the abnormal to a post-Enlightenment society at particular times of the year becomes

understandable. After all, these are the times of the year when the mastery of nature through rational thought and process is most challenged, when even in the world's leading economies the thoughts of many people turn to the basic concerns of warmth, food and comfort in the face of the weather. Science and rationality can provide improved shelter, more efficient food and warmth provision, greater comfort, but they cannot entirely conceal, nor can they control, the change of the seasons, the end of the harvests, and the onset of cold and darkness. These changes make clear the underlying reality that humans do not have the control over the world that they think they do, despite centuries of rationality and science. They drive home the point that, however much it may be understood by experts, there are other forces at work in the world that will make things happen whether humans want it or not.

The ghost story comes to represent the different concerns that haunt the society of the time. It is particularly involved with representing uncertainties, using its uncertainty around the existence or not of some form of continued existence after life in echoes of uncertainties around how a society deals with the death of the only monarch that most of its citizens have known, or the uncertainty of the upheavals of belief in the face of science, of the agrarian / mercantile way of life in the face of industrialisation, and so on. This is not a case of claiming that all ghost stories of a particular period are concerned with a particular uncertainty. Each author has their own concerns and influences, including those of editors and specific audiences. However, the relationship between past and present, between what has gone and what is to come, *is* integral to the ghost story, making it a genre particularly suited to times of change.

The growing domesticity and intimacy of the genre relates to a growing domesticisation of culture and entertainment in Britain and in the United States. As has already been seen, there is a move from outdoor social events, such as the Neolithic festivals of the dead, towards indoor social events, such as the hosting of Christmas festivities for the local people by the Squire described by Washington Irving. This was then succeeded by a domestic focus, where celebrations were concerned more with the family and the immediate household. The Dickensian model that this represented still had some connections and concerns with wider society, but the model of Christmas entertainment was also becoming more insular, and became even more so as an increasing amount of entertainment was

available through first the wireless and later the television. These media gave the impression of instant and contemporaneous connection with wider society through a shared experience, while facilitating and even encouraging a more insular festive experience. Put simply, if all of the Christmas entertainment that you need is on the radio or television in the warmth and safety of your own home, why go out? The continuation and replication of existing traditions on these new media simply adds to the illusion that they represent a shared social experience, that they are simply a new way of celebrating the old festival.

The Christmas ghost story has some survival outside of broadcasting. There are a number of anthologies of ghost stories for Christmas, but then there are seasonal anthologies to mark most festivals. Some periodicals will occasionally publish a ghost story especially for this time of year. There are also Christmas events where people will gather for a ghost story telling, frequently a recital of *A Christmas Carol*, but others seek to emphasise some of the intimacy of a reading more in the style of M.R.James entertaining colleagues and choristers. Yet these are presented as heritage events, frequently with the reader in costume, rather than as living traditions. For a living tradition, we have to turn to the broadcast media, as covered in the next chapter.

Halloween

So if Christmas is a well-established season for ghost stories in Britain, and particularly in England, then what of the rest of the English-speaking world? As we have already seen, American writers such as Washington Irving and Henry James viewed the ghost story as a part of Christmas, if very much in an English setting. Then there is the 1963 song 'The Most Wonderful Time of the Year' by American songwriters Edward Pola and George Wyle, which provides a list of the joys of Christmas to look forward to which includes 'scary ghost stories'. Yet the Christmas ghost story did not hold as a strong tradition in the United States, with the exception of *A Christmas Carol*. Similarly, an 1872 article on 'Christmas in Australia' would make a point of the difference in traditions relating to seasonal spectres, alongside its long list of English customs which did feature in the Australian Christmas. The reason given is that 'No ghost could stand the bold glance of an Australian sun, or tarry where no ivy robes old mouldering ruins, and no churchyard drear exhales the poisonous breath

in which the prowling spirits revel' (An Australian Colonist 1872, p.811). The implication is that, like the United States, Australia is simply too *new*, and too sunny, for ghost stories to apply.

However, a more likely reason for this being one of the traditions not to carry on in Australia can be found in the history of another colony developing its own identity: the United States. Both countries had strong connections to England, but both also had particular connections to Irish and Scottish cultures. There is thus a strong element of non-English culture in these new cultures, one which emphasises Halloween over Christmas as a time for the ghost story. A 1903 article in *The Saturday Review* claimed that 'In Keltic folklore Christmastide has little part. The spirits of heathenness have in Keltic lands half annexed All Hallows E'en and S.Mark's Eve to the older faith - but on the night of Mary's blessed Babe, the ghosts do not walk' (Anon. 1903: 797). Like the Scottish and Irish cultures, the Welsh retained the idea of the start of winter, the old Samhain and the Christian All Hallows Eve, as a time for connecting the living and the dead.

One thing to note here is the significance of Guy Fawkes Night, Bonfire Treason Day or Bonfire Night. Established by a 1606 Act of Parliament, 5 November is intended to commemorate in perpetuity the attempted blowing up of the Houses of Parliament and the Protestant King James I of England (James VI of Scotland) in 1605 by a group of Catholic dissenters. Bonfire Night celebrations still centre around fireworks, as celebratory ripostes to the failed explosion of the Gunpowder Plot. They also centre, as the name suggests, on bonfires, with the tradition of burning mannequins to represent Fawkes, as well as other figures of hatred such as the Pope. The anti-Catholic elements of these celebrations have, generally, been forgotten, and any mannequin now is likely to be a generic 'Guy', so-named for tradition rather than any specificity, or a representation of a contemporary popular hate figure.

However, the significance of the celebration comes more in its date. Coinciding with the fire festivals that were still to be found at the start of the seventeenth century winter, Guy Fawkes Night essentially took over the practices from those festivals, coming to dominate them in English culture. This may well be because the tradition was not a strong one in English traditional culture in any case, with David Cressy having pointed out that, with the exception of Wales and north-west England, 'there is no sign of such a festival at this time of year across most of England' before the

establishment of Bonfire Night (Hutton 1994, p.184). In Scotland and Ireland, though, the celebrations of Halloween continued to dominate. Thus, when Scottish and Irish immigrants in the United States and Canada were looking for commonalities between their own disparate national, regional and local cultures, one of the places that they would have found it was in the celebration of Halloween. These celebrations would have included traditions of fires, and of charms intended to tell an individual who they would marry, and of games, and revelry, and story-telling.

The American Halloween and the modern British Christmas both assumed their significance and shape in the nineteenth century (Rogers 2002, p.49). The Puritan traditions and ideas of building a more rational new nation in the United States had sufficient influence that 'superstitious' festivals such as Halloween were discouraged, officially and socially. However, the influx of Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century, particularly at the time of the Great Famine in the middle of the century, brought a revived influx of Irish traditions, and in a concentrated form. With communities moving together, staying together, and forming the largest immigrant group in the nation, the chances were improved of traditional beliefs and activities to survive, including Halloween. These chances may have been aided by the arrival, late in the nineteenth century, of a smaller, but still significant, influx of Scots immigrants.

Prior to this, most Scots immigrants had headed to Canada rather than the United States, with the result that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the combined Scots and Irish citizens of Canada outnumbered those of English descent. In Canada, Halloween was even taken as a non-sectarian holiday to celebrate Scottish ethnicity (Rogers 2002, pp.50-51). Because it came to be treated as a pan-Celtic holiday, it also stood as an event which was not based on sectarian history, like Bonfire Night, which had carried over its popularity from England to colonial America, but which faded in popularity in the nineteenth century United States. Because Bonfire Night marked a Catholic plot against a Protestant monarchy, they were resisted by the American revolutionary leaders in order to avoid offending their French allies against the British (Morton 2012, p. 27).

The popularity of Halloween in the United States could be related both to its characteristics and its lack of definition. Even as All Hallow's Eve, the festival was one without a particular patron saint, and this and its carnivalesque practices helped to make the occasion less specific. It could

therefore absorb other festivals and traditions, presenting a non-culturally specific opportunity for celebration. In other words, it offered the opportunity for diverse communities to come together to form bonds as a new, American community.

The carnival aspects to Halloween carried over from Scots and Irish traditions, as well as absorbing other traditions, to allow a space of social inversion and transgression, as well as the policing of community norms. Rogers records the way that revelry and pranks, including vandalism, at Halloween were largely accepted in North America in the nineteenth century, excepting those few occasions where lives may have been endangered, so that the festival acted very much as a licensed time of transgression (2002, pp.58-67). He argues that Halloween has long been a time for a ritualistic purging of the community, enacted usually by adolescents and young adults who take the opportunity to disguise themselves and make the dominant community's displeasure known to those perceived as 'different'. While more conservative social movements did try to suppress the permitted chaos, society in general accepted it. Such acceptance is illustrated by the Halloween sequence in the 1944 film *Meet Me in St. Louis*, where young children are free to burn furniture in the street, attack reclusive recent immigrants with flour, and are only reprimanded for a dangerous prank which threatens lives.

This implies that it is the public disorder that is significant for Halloween, as opposed to the private order that has come to be represented by Christmas. Where Christmas is a festival for the peaceful celebration of family, following the post-Dickensian ideal, Halloween has remained a time of disruption that has largely avoided the domestication of Christmas. Indeed, the tradition of trick or treating is about both leaving the home, as disguised individuals seeking sweet bribes, and as homeowners protecting their dwelling from these unruly visitors who disturb the peace of the home. Halloween is thus a time when a disruption to the normal flow of domestic life is expected within American culture, and this is echoed in its television culture.

But what is notably missing from this brief history of Halloween celebrations is any mention of a tradition of telling ghost stories. Tales such as Edith Wharton's 'All Hallow's Eve' may be set at Halloween, but they do not present the festivities as incorporating ghost story telling. There are hints that there was such a tradition; for example, in 1834 Denis O'Donoho contributed 'The Irish Peasants: Halloween' to *The Dublin Penny Journal*, relating the marking of Halloween in an Irish peasants'

cottage, including dancing, drinking, a girl using a charm to see if her sweetheart will propose, and the telling of a ghost story. Similar events are relayed in Burns' 1785 poem 'Halloween', which focuses on divinatory practices to see who would be paired with who, but which includes a mention of 'unco tales' being told, again suggesting that the weird tale was a traditional part of Halloween celebrations. Morton relates how Scots explorer J.E.Alexander spent Halloween of 1833 on an expedition in Canada, where he and his companions 'recounted the legends and ghost stories, with which the Scottish crones are wont to affright their juvenile audience on that dreaded night' (2012, p.178). However, despite these few mentions, the most important traditions of Halloween appear to have been those of charms to predict the future. As to ghost stories, it appears as if Halloween was seen more as a festival at which supernatural events might happen, and so it was a season that ghost stories should be told about rather than a season for telling ghost stories.

With the start of the twentieth century, Halloween celebrations were, like the English Christmas celebrations of fifty years earlier, becoming more domesticated and tamed for bourgeois entertainment. Beginning in 1898, pamphlets giving instructions on how to celebrate a domestic Halloween were published, carrying on to the end of the 1920s. Amongst the expected games, decorations, jokes, recipes and playlets, *Werner's Readings and Recitations: Hallowe'en Festivities* of 1903 included a section of ghost stories for reading at these parties, and subsequent books and pamphlets continued this idea. However, these ghost stories are incorporated into a game, in which each player has only the length of time that it takes for a bundle of sticks they are holding to burn down in which to tell their 'awful, grewsome [sic], ghostly' tale (Schell 1903, p.48), or they are part of a competition with a prize for the person who is best able to convince the audience that the ghostly tale happened to them (Schell 1903, p.83). These games are intended for adults, as are most of the activities suggested in this book, suggesting that the children were either excluded, or were catered for by other parties. However, by the 1930s, guides for Halloween parties were almost entirely aimed at events for children (Morton 2012, p.166).

The modern Halloween is a product of the second half of the twentieth century. As with the Dickensian Christmas, Halloween became a more middle-class festival as the concerns for property and propriety came to dominate, and ungoverned vandalism and revelry came to be more codified into

organised events. Rogers argues that 'trick-or-treating sought to marginalize adolescent pranking and to defuse the antagonism inherent in the festive tribute, transforming the exchange into a rite of consumption' (2002, p.87). More specifically, Rogers claims that the media, particularly the film industry, did not really develop Halloween as a season of horror until the 1970s, most specifically following the commercial success of John Carpenter's *Halloween* in 1978. Carpenter's film uses its Halloween setting to allow for the integration of imagery from classic or Gothic horror into its modern spook story, as well as providing an excuse for a masked murderer to be able to move about largely unobserved and unchallenged. At the same time, it taps into traditions of All Hallow's Eve as a time for courting rituals, with its inciting incident and the majority of its murders focused on sexually-active teen couples left to their devices by absent parents. In this way, Rogers suggests, the film represents an 'allegory of familial dispersal and decay, where Halloween is viewed nostalgically as a potentially unifying and satisfying family rite, [but] where killers more easily prowl' (2002, p.121). The late sixties and early seventies were also the time of the growth of horror movie marathons on television, presenting the chance to nostalgically revisit the horror films seen in youth and now available for television broadcasting, or to see these films for the first time but presented in a manner which frames them nostalgically, possibly through the accepting haze of camp. This was also the time when Halloween specials became more prevalent in US television.

Since the 1970s, there has been a growing fear for the safety of children taking part in Halloween events outside the home. So, like the English Christmas, Halloween has moved from being a social event for the community, to becoming a bourgeois opportunity for an organised party; it has moved from wildness and carnival, to being domesticated, organised and, of course, commercialised. Etzioni takes this as an indicator of a more fragmented and particularised society, in which people are more connected to a specific group aligned through characteristics such as religion or race than they are to their community as a whole, although he also points out that there have been conscious attempts to reverse this trend since the 1990s (2004, p.26). However, the social fragmentation suggested by the way that celebrating Halloween has developed seems particularly ironic given the way that the US Halloween developed in part as a way to bind together disparate cultural groups in a shared celebration.

Conclusion

The seasonal ghost story is a tradition, like so many, which is at once both old and recent, a timeless custom and a conscious recreation. It may have its roots in ancient beliefs about the times of the year when spirits were particularly prevalent, but it is also a transformation from folk belief, and folk story as a guide to behaviour, to consciously authored fiction. At each stage of the transformation of the ghost story for Christmas, we see the transformation of the festival itself, as it moves from a social gathering for the community as a whole, to a domesticated gathering for the family, to a more individualised occasion. Similarly, the winter's tale moves from being a story shared amongst the community, to one generated by an individual as a novelty for a group audience or individual.

The split between Halloween and Christmas ghost or horror story traditions demonstrates a cultural division, and the importance of these calendar customs to cultural identity. At each stage of this development, the traditions of Christmas have been tied up with nostalgia and concepts of how the past was, and how the present should be. Halloween traditions have similarly drawn upon past traditions, but have also been consciously used as a way of binding together disparate cultures and traditions as a new shared event. Underlying each of the modern traditions of Christmas and Halloween is a particular split between English and other British cultures, a split which is also tied up with the division between Protestantism and Catholicism in the British Isles. These differences, and those moments of change, division and differentiation, are thus associated with issues around cultural and political power.

Yet, like so many cultural movements, these negotiations of status and identity take place largely unconsciously for the majority of people, disguised by nostalgia, 'common sense' and habit. An individual author, or group of people, may consciously decide to design traditions to support a particular idea of identity and culture, but these traditions need to become part of the regular behaviour of the population at large in order to truly become traditions, and to be understood as actually representing something about the culture. The next chapter examines the traditions of ghost and horror tales at Christmas and Halloween, in Britain and America, as they move to the media of

radio and television, to explore how these new media adopted and adapted these existing traditions, and took their part in the related changes in mass culture.